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Economic and Social Council

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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Agenda item 4 (a)
Mandated areas: economic and social development

Chairperson's summary of discussion

Economic and social development

Member States

1. The representative of the observer Government of Canada noted that Canada had made a number of efforts to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in development. In particular, indigenous peoples participated on environmental assessment and regulatory boards and land claim settlement agreements, which provided for land, financial resources and agreed access to natural resources and various forms of self-government. He drew attention to such initiatives as the Artic Council and the development of a regional partnering approach to increase the participation of indigenous peoples in development and initiatives for indigenous peoples to become employed in the industries active in the north of Canada. A number of Governments discussed various mechanisms, such as the Department of Maori Affairs, which had the responsibility for elaborating government objectives for Maori development and coordinating Maori communities and other government departments.

United Nations system

2 The representative of the World Summit on Information Society addressed the Forum and briefed the Forum on the Summit, to be held in Geneva in September 2004. The Summit would provide a unique opportunity to discuss at a high level worldwide access to modern technologies. There were two forms of participation in the Summit, through written reports (indigenous peoples and modern technologies) or by physically participating through running a workshop at the Summit.

3. The Director of the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat briefed the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on the recently completed work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. She noted the participation of many stakeholders, including indigenous peoples. Economic development, social development and protection of the environment were regarded

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as the three pillars of sustainable development. Renewable resources were vital to indigenous peoples. She emphasized the importance of protecting indigenous knowledge and the use of traditional indigenous environmental knowledge in environmental management.

Indigenous peoples organizations

4. Many indigenous peoples representatives called for the concept of development to be reconsidered and reconstructed from an indigenous perspective. Many indigenous representatives noted that, for too long, indigenous peoples had been the victims rather than the beneficiaries of development. Some noted that the Eurocentric approach to development, as historically imposed on indigenous peoples, equated development with achieving the living standards of western civilization. Some indigenous representatives also noted that development, to indigenous peoples, might include developing and practising their spirituality, which required access to sacred sites. Some representatives noted that sustainable development had been promoted by indigenous peoples for millennia and indigenous peoples had (intergenerational) cultural obligations to ensure the sustainable use of land, waters and natural resources. Many indigenous representatives noted the incidence of human rights violations associated with development and that development itself was a human right (see article 1 of the Declaration on the Right to Development).

5. A number of indigenous representatives noted that the degree to which indigenous peoples enjoyed participation in democracy and society was directly linked with their participation in development. Many representatives noted that their access to the right of self-determination, self-development and the right to lands and territories (including waters) had a direct effect of whether they were able to participate in and enjoy the outcomes of development. Some indigenous representatives stressed the importance of peace as a necessary foundation for development. They further expressed concern about the increasing militarization of indigenous territories, which included military bases, practice ranges and dumping of toxic materials.

6. Some indigenous peoples raised the issue of the impact of private sector developments and mega-projects, such as large-scale mining and large dams. Many fears were raised about the fragility of ecosystems and displaced communities caused by such work. Many indigenous representatives noted the link between globalization, development and the deteriorating circumstances of many of the world's indigenous peoples. Many representatives noted that the failure to fully implement or honour national legislation and international treaties by some States had had a severe impact on the ability for indigenous peoples to enjoy their right to development.

7. The Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner of Australia applauded the good work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in particular the UNDP *2000 Human Development Report* (on human rights and development), and recommended that the specific situation of indigenous peoples be considered in future reports. He specifically recommended that the Forum acknowledge the excellent work on poverty eradication and the integration of human rights and development standards carried out by UNDP to date, and requested UNDP to continue that work by specifically applying it to the situation of indigenous peoples

as peoples with a distinct status, a people who suffered extreme marginalization and whose very survival remained under threat.

Forum members

8. Mr. Jacanamijoy was nominated as the member responsible for collecting recommendations on development. Ms. Lux de Coti noted that the United Nations system should devise policies with indigenous peoples and that indigenous peoples should also participate in Government policy development. She noted that it would be useful for the Secretariat to create a database of government policies and programmes as a resource for Forum members. Many members believed that the Forum should monitor the implementation of policies in the United Nations system. Many members recognized the outstanding issue of free prior and informed consent and suggested convening a workshop to take that issue forward.

9. Mr. Kouevi noted that self-determination and development were intimately linked. He noted the importance of food security and the importance of land to development. He recommended the establishment of a new international decade for the world's indigenous peoples. Ms. Nicolaisen noted the importance of briefings on world summits and how that could assist the Forum to plan for its participation. Ms. Strogalschikova noted the importance of access to forests for traditional forest dwellers. Ms. Trask Mililani requested that the Forum seek the involvement of the World Trade Agency in the Inter-Agency Support Group. Ms. Njuma noted that underdevelopment was linked to lack of information and access to information technology. Mr. Littlechild reiterated the importance of free prior and informed consent and support for a workshop to take that issue forward. He noted also the importance of sport for development and called for support of the 2003 Magglingen Declaration.